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AHR *Conversation: On Transnational History*

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This year, the AHR *inaugurates what we hope to be an annual "Conversation" on topics of wide interest to historians. Inspired by our sister journal, the* Journal of American History, *which two years ago introduced its "Interchange" feature, our goal is to bring several historians together in a conversational encounter online, where ideas can be exchanged across different geographical, chronological, and subject specialties in a manner that will contribute to our overall understanding of an important theme. For our first foray we chose the topic "Transnational History."*

Transnational history is hardly new, neither to the profession nor to the AHR. *Indeed, more than fifteen years ago, the journal published a Forum on the topic in relationship to American history (*AHR *16, no. 4* [*October 1991*] *); and our more recent issues have increasingly featured articles by historians whose vistas are transnational in scope. But like other innovative approaches to history, it is in danger of becoming merely a buzzword among historians, more a label than a practice, more expansive in its meaning than precise in its application, more a fashion of the moment than a durable approach to the serious study of history. Our hope is that this Conversation will help scholars and students think about transnational history in terms that highlight both its capacious possibilities and its specificity as an approach. The six historians who agreed to participate are all practitioners of transnational history. Christopher Bayly is a modern historian who has written about the British Empire, South Asia, and global history. Sven Beckert is a historian of nineteenth-century America, with a special focus on social and economic history. Matthew Connelly is a twentieth-century diplomatic historian with an interest in international and global affairs. Isabel Hofmeyr studies African and English literature and the global circulation of texts. Wendy Kozol writes and teaches on gender, feminism, visual culture, and human rights. Patricia Seed has written on early modern Latin America and the European conquest of the New World, among other subjects. The Conversation took place over the summer and fall of 2006.*

AHR Editor: Transnational history is no longer new, but it does seem to be the latest incarnation of an approach that has successively been characterized as comparative, international, world, and global history. To be sure, there are important distinctions between these approaches, but they all are characterized by a desire to break out of the nation-state or singular nation-state as the category of analysis, and especially to eschew the ethnocentrism that once characterized the writing of history in the

West. So, how do we understand the distinctiveness of transnational history and its relevance to the practice of history today?

Chris Bayly: In general, I think that the distinctions between world, global, and transnational history have never adequately been explained. World history, as I understood it, emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, when old general courses on "Western Civ" in U.S. universities began to seem a little ethnocentric. "Global history" was a term which emerged in the 1990s when economists and campaigners began to debate the issue of "globalization." It seemed to cover much of the same ground but perhaps gave more of a sense of change as historical processes were understood to have become more "global" over time. At least in Europe, I get the sense that "transnational history" stands in the same relationship to "international history" as "global history" does to "world history": that it is much the same thing, except that the term "transnational" gives a sense of movement and interpenetration. It is broadly associated with the study of diasporas, social or political, which cross national boundaries, etc. I have to confess that I find "transnational" a restrictive term for the sort of work which I am interested in. Before 1850, large parts of the globe were not dominated by nations so much as by empires, city-states, diasporas, etc. I do believe a sense of nationality already existed in some parts of the non-Western world, of course, but to designate "global history" as "transnational history" would not be very useful before 1914, if then.

Patricia Seed: As historians, we often legitimately employ words from the present to describe an apparently analogous situation in the past. Many of us begin with a situation or problem we understand in the present, and seek to locate contrasts with events or circumstances that occurred long ago.

Take, for example, a title such as "Race and Class in Ancient Rome." In the first place, neither word existed in ancient Latin with the meaning that it has today. The historian in that instance is identifying characteristics of Roman society that appear similar to those in contemporary race- and class-organized societies. In so doing, he is attempting to draw out features of Roman society that render it both similar to and different from contemporary society.

While an historian rarely describes explicitly how or why he selects specific features to compare and omits others, nonetheless by making these implied contrasts, he conveys the unique dimensions of Roman society (as well as those shared with the present). Such tacitly comparative history usefully exposes familiar and unfamiliar aspects of ancient history to those of us who do not work in this particular field. In fact, the shared vocabulary of the present—employed to subtly compare with the past—remains one of the methodologically central mechanisms of the cohesion of history, for it allows members of the profession to share a common ground rather than to fragment (as have other disciplines) into entirely different factions that no longer share a common project.

Transnational history by extension identifies an inherently comparative notion of history, because it takes a contemporary concept that many people explicitly understand—the nation—and seeks to address situations in the past that were analogous to the one we experience in the present. For many years, immigration history—whether free or forced—focused on the impact of migration on either the destination or origin. Introducing this transnational dimension has led historians to examine the impact and reasons for migration at both the point of departure *and* that of arrival. Furthermore, these studies have usefully addressed factors behind the previously under-recognized return of many migrants to their land of origin. Historians of slavery pioneered this approach long ago by examining both sides of the migration—albeit usually in two different fields: African and American history.

Transnational history thus implies a comparison between the contemporary movement of groups, goods, technology, or people across national borders and the transit of similar or related objects or people in an earlier time. The topic enables us to follow migratory phenomena under a common rubric. For me, however, the most important contribution is the ability to follow *people* (wherever they moved). For example, Sephardim moved out of the Iberian Peninsula after 1492, traveling from a kingdom to other kingdoms, to city-states, to sultanates, and to republics. Under the rubric of transnational history, an historian is authorized to follow these emigrants in transition from Iberia to London to Antwerp, to Ferrara to Liguria and other places. While scholars can certainly examine Sephardim in Antwerp or Ferrara under the transnational label, they are empowered to also track more mobile segments of the population to differently governed locales, not merely those fixed in a given place.

Isabel Hofmeyr: I agree with Christopher Bayly that the terms are far from stable or self-evident. The term "world history" is not really used here (in South Africa) but would be understood as a compendium approach that gathers up whatever the course designer deems a significant event. (That the term need not necessarily always mean this emerges from David Damrosch's book *What Is World Literature?* Reacting to similar compendium approaches to the idea of "world literature," Damrosch suggests that the idea be construed less as an ever-growing bookshelf of texts and more as a "mode of circulation and reading," an approach which would direct analytical attention to certain categories of text that circulate in particular ways.)

The term "global history" is closely allied to the "brand" term "globalization" (or more properly "anti-globalization" or "anti–corporate globalization") and is hence associated with an activist scholarship, a situation of both strength and weakness. With regard to its weakness, such approaches can end up taking us back to early versions of World Systems Theory and development/underdevelopment, which tend to flatten the complexities of the "Third World." In such flattening, the "Third World" becomes the victim of the forces of the capital/the North/the metropole. The political complexity of "the South" disappears.

For this reason, I tend to prefer the term "transnational history," as it opens up broader analytical possibilities for understanding the complex linkages, networks, and actors in the global South. Sugata Bose's wonderful book *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* seems an exemplary instance of such a transnational approach. (I see as well that Christopher Bayly endorses the book as opening up space between "histories of "globalization" and histories of regions.")

I understand the term "transnational" as attempting to bring into being a field which Patricia Seed has elegantly outlined as a world of comparative possibility. However, as Bayly points out, the term, at least on the face of it, may appear to be limiting. One way to think around this limitation is to compare the biography of the term "transnational" to the career of the rubric "postcolonial": technically the latter term may denote something like "the post-independence era," but it has come to describe a wide field of endeavor which seeks to understand the cultural meanings of geopolitical processes in a world shaped by imperial forces. (This picture could of course be further complicated, since it seems to me that terms like "global history" and "transnationalism" are competing with "postcolonialism" in the academic marketplace, just as "postcolonialism" previously competed with "area studies.")

The key claim of any transnational approach is its central concern with movements, flows, and circulation, not simply as a theme or motif but as an analytic set of methods which defines the endeavor itself. Put another way, a concern with transnationalism would direct one's attention to the "space of the flows," to borrow a term from Appadurai, whose work from the late 1980s has been so central to the rise of transnational approaches.

The claim of transnational methods is not simply that historical processes are made in different places but that they are constructed in the movement between places, sites, and regions. One obvious example here would be analyses of English literature which demonstrate that the idea of an apparently national literary canon is made, and hence needs to be understood as emerging between various sites of empire.

One may of course wish to ask whether there are not existing traditions of scholarship which already do this work for us. Put differently, do we need the term "transnational history"?

To describe such traditions is simultaneously to draw out some of the intellectual genealogies of the term itself, and there are of course numerous traditions one could evince—for example, studies of the African diaspora and transnational forms of blackness; studies of imperialism and/or capitalism; various stripes of Marxist analysis of internationalist movements; area studies (which in its broadest conceptions is concerned with transnational processes, e.g., pan-Africanism—in reality, however, much area studies is dominated by anticolonial nationalist narratives); postcolonial theory; comparative literature and questions of translation (whose centrality to issues of globalization is increasingly being demonstrated by theorists like Emily Apter and Lydia Liu); maritime studies; Indian Ocean studies. One could of course con-

tinue, but I'm running ahead here, and it seems that these various traditions may in turn be the focus of further debate here.

Wendy Kozol: Regarding the emergence of transnational history, I think we need also to consider the dialogic relationships between social justice movements and changes in academic discourse. Chris Bayly points out that beginning in the late 1960s, shifts in historical discourse emerged in response to concerns about ethnocentrism. I would add that critiques of U.S. and European imperialism and racism, as well as challenges to gender inequalities and heteronormativity, have also been extremely influential in the development of transnational history. Anticolonial and nationalist movements, along with feminist, civil rights, and LGBT movements, have compelled reconsiderations of how historians understand migrations, state formations, globalization, etc. Dialogues between activists and scholars have produced transnational historical analyses that explore the social inequalities that structure the "movements, flows, and circulations" that Isabel Hofmeyr notes are defining characteristics of transnationalism.

Transnational feminist activists, for instance, confront the limitations of global feminism, and in particular the assumption of a global sisterhood (where gender is assumed to unite women). Instead, these activists articulate social justice claims through their understanding of the inequalities between First and Third World women's experiences and resources. In dialogue with these critiques, transnational feminist historians have begun to reexamine how processes and institutions such as colonialization, modernization, and feminist movements have sustained critical divisions that have differentially privileged or harmed groups through gender, racial, and/or sexual frameworks.

In the United States, similar interactions have occurred between ethnic studies and anti-racist, nationalist movements. Following the influential work of Paul Gilroy on the Black Atlantic, Asian American activists and historians discuss the Pacific Rim as a regional framework for understanding migration, diaspora, community formation, and citizenship. Immigration histories, for instance, examine how circular migration, kin networks, and communications technologies reconfigure the concept of the border as a stable marker of national identity. Such considerations in turn have opened up historical inquiries into the complex and often conflicted identifications that diasporic communities have with ideals of "citizenship" and of "home."

One vexing issue that has arisen is, What constitutes the object of historical inquiry once you challenge the stability of the border to define the nation? Where, for instance, does "American history" stop and Asian or African history begin?

Sven Beckert: This is a tricky issue. It is perhaps best to start by reminding ourselves that global, world, transnational, and international history have much in common. They are all engaged in a project to reconstruct aspects of the human past that transcend any one nation-state, empire, or other politically defined territory. This sets these approaches apart from most of the history that has been written in most

of the world during the past one hundred years. Because history as an academic discipline grew up alongside the nation-state and became one of its principal ideological pillars, it allowed historians practicing in strong nation-states to focus excessively on their own national histories in isolation from those of the rest of the world. Global, world, transnational, and international histories are all in their own ways critical of such enclosures.

While these histories have much in common, historians have taken various approaches to the subject, some of which are quite compatible with one another, but others of which are not. There are histories, for example, that claim to examine the human past as a whole. This approach, which can focus on the reconstruction of various "civilizations," is principally interested in comprehensiveness, sometimes in comparisons, but seldom in connections. Other histories focus on interstate relations, and thus on connections, but they pay little attention to non-state actors. There are, moreover, an increasing number of historians who continue to focus on the history of one politically defined territory, but do so by putting its history into a larger context. Connections here are important, but only insofar as they relate to this one particular territory.

If I understand the subject of our conversation correctly, we are debating here an undertaking that is slightly different from any of these approaches: We are discussing an approach to history that focuses on a whole range of connections that transcend politically bounded territories and connect various parts of the world to one another. Networks, institutions, ideas, and processes constitute these connections, and though rulers, empires, and states are important in structuring them, they transcend politically bounded territories. We might, for example, reconstruct far-reaching networks of merchants, working-class radicals, or neoliberal economists. We might analyze processes such as proletarianization across various continents. We might examine the global spread of nationalism. Or we might study the growing interconnections within the world as such, namely the history of globalization.

What shall we call such history? The term "global history" works well, as it suggests the potential scope of these investigations. However, much of the type of history that I describe above is not necessarily global in scope, examining instead particular regions (which might or might not be contiguous) connected by particular networks. The term "transnational history," in contrast, does allow for such limitations, and while I understand Chris Bayly's reservations, I still think it is the best description of the kind of history we are debating.

In the end, I am not sure that it is worthwhile spending much time on the finer points of these distinctions. There are other, more important issues that we are faced with. For example, why does it seem that more printed pages have been dedicated to discussions on the need for and methodology of transnational history than to empirical research? Chris Bayly's brilliant book is still an exception. Also, we need to consider how we as historians retain our audience if we move away from our attachment to national histories.

Matthew Connelly: Sven's right: We are grasping for ways to describe the history that we need and want because there are still so few examples that can demonstrate its full potential. The conceptual and professional routines that produced a mountain of national and continental history are not easily surmounted. If they were, then all of these manifestos for transnational and global history would be manifestly wrong. But we must keep trying because we cannot otherwise explain the history of migration, empires, social movements, and so on—in other words, the origins of the contemporary world.

We are not just talking about "getting it right," or avoiding confusion, though the present state of postcolonial studies should provide a cautionary tale. Instead, we are positioning ourselves in what, alas, Isabel Hofmeyr quite rightly calls an academic marketplace, a market that is also increasingly global.

Transnational history has become a brand, to the point that some invoke the term and talk the talk even when doing very conventional kinds of scholarship. I suspect that this is, at least in part, a response to nationalist claims on our teaching and research, claims that are especially insistent in a place like New York. Yet this is not going to sustain interest in the field if we do not discover new ways to speak to people's contemporary concerns, and actually have something important to say. Unfortunately, postcolonial studies is an example of how a "hot" field can become self-referential to the point of irrelevance, as the recent revival of unapologetic imperialist rhetoric in the U.S. has made painfully clear.

If one considers the political challenge of changing just one history department—which in the U.S. is typically divided into camps of Americanists, Europeanists, and "Otherists," and further divided into regional and national specializations—the need for inclusiveness becomes obvious. We need everyone who is willing to challenge these ossified categories if we are to create new curricula, new jobs, and a new generation of students who will not have to work so hard to work outside of them. So I am inclined to adopt a combination of terms that can define a common project, even if we approach it differently. International, transnational, world, and global history each mean different things. But together they can contribute to a new way of understanding the world—so long as we let our questions determine the appropriate frame of analysis, and resist the temptation to chase after "the next big thing."

My own path began with international history, which grew out of dissatisfaction with diplomatic history—a field that, by definition, should have occupied the space between societies, but instead had become a subfield of national historiography, especially in the U.S. Here too there were many manifestos calling for change but few examples to follow. Christopher Thorne, Charles Maier, Paul Kennedy, Akira Iriye, Odd Arne Westad, Georges-Henri Soutou, and Leopoldo Nuti, among others, finally rescued the study of world politics from the margins by returning it to fundamentals—above all, international, multi-archival research—while at the same time asking new questions, such as how cultural beliefs and practices shape interstate relations. But investigating how nation-states are continually reconstituted, often

through conflict, led to more transnational approaches. How else to explain the growing challenges to state sovereignty, or the rise of international and nongovernmental organizations, or the global response to inherently transnational phenomena, such as migration and environmental change? "Transnational" means little or nothing for most of world history—at least nothing interesting—yet it is becoming indispensable to describe crucial trends in more recent times.

Few people define themselves as "world" or "global" historians, on the other hand. The field of world history has too long a history, largely as a teaching field. Here again the demands of the academic marketplace—in terms of social as well as intellectual capital—make themselves felt. Yet anyone who has had to offer a world history course, and serve up the civilization du jour week after week, has seen the need for an alternative approach. Trying to teach the history of everybody and everything, as well as dissatisfaction with comparative analyses that treated societies in isolation, helped inspire studies that instead tracked encounters and exchanges of all kinds—including exploration, commodities, contagion, and material culture. In addition to Chris Bayly, I look to people like William H. McNeill, Sidney Mintz, Philip Curtin, and Ken Pomeranz. They created pathbreaking works, quite literally, but even the most intrepid "world" or global" historians rarely describe themselves as such, if only because it seems presumptuous.

Yet I am convinced that, precisely because they are distinct and are defining themselves through their differences, all of these fields together can produce a new history of the world.

Of course, the proof will be in the pudding. New fields will become known by the work they inspire, not more manifestos. But we can, at least, define success. We will have succeeded when people no longer ask what is international, or transnational, or global history, or at least will be met with the same incredulity that now greets someone who asks whether gender or the environment have a history.

Smarter students will instead ask how it is that anyone ever wanted to study international relations from the perspective of just one state, or research immigrants without investigating where they came from, or teach European history without the Ottomans.

Chris Bayly: This has been very useful. I think I now have a sense of how these various genres of "wider world history" (to use another problematic phrase) have emerged and what each definition can offer. I am persuaded by Isabel and Matt that "transnational" history has the advantage of including works which raise critical issues about transnational flows, but do not claim to embrace the whole world: the work of Pomeranz, Bin Wong, and Catherine Hall, for instance, and, from an earlier period, the seminal work of Bailyn and Pocock. By being inclusive of the regional, the national, and the local in historical writing, we can perhaps avoid the factionalism into which academics so easily fall. I already hear colleagues denouncing global history and saying that the only way to do "real history" is at the level of the local and

the family, the history of "experience." Perhaps this more inclusive definition will allow us to escape the fate of simply reliving the experience of the 1950s–1980s, when "area studies," family history, and local history succeeded each other as the new holy grail.

So I am a convert (or at least an occasional conformist) to the idea of transnational history. Yet I still think it's very important to stress that the "nations" embedded in the term "transnational" were not originary elements to be "transcended" by the forces we are discussing. Rather, they were the products—and often rather late products—of those very processes. We should not fall back again into a wider world history constituted simply by "nations and nationalism" and the forces that transcended them, though Hobsbawm's books remain among the few works that students can read and understand.

That brings me to the important point that Matt makes about education. Whatever its virtue as a form of scholarship, transnational history is also a vital form of education. In Britain, many history students come to university with a detailed knowledge of Henry VIII and Hitler, without any notion that these figures represent much broader political and ideological moments in transnational history. Alternatively, they have been taught a kind of documentary fetishism. As far as I know, there are similar problems in the U.S. with beginning undergraduates' contextual knowledge. Transnational history, therefore, is a vital way of getting students to think more broadly and challenge their own presuppositions. To take one example: What was the international significance and context of the American Civil War? What does thinking about this tell us about the Civil War in America itself? Sven has already made important contributions to this issue. But it merits the attention of a whole school of historians.

However, I find that teaching and writing transnational history that can be understood by our basic "consumers" is incredibly difficult. There are many problems of geography and context, but by far the most pressing one is how to "model" change over time for a readership of any level of sophistication. This concern with the origins of change is, in one sense, the thing that makes historical writing stand apart from most of the other social sciences, which are essentially synchronic. The problem is less acute for national and even regional histories. But dealing with the origins of change in transnational history magnifies an issue which remains a mystery right at the heart of our discipline. Most of the historians we are now designating "transnational" adopt a foundational approach, though with various degrees of subtlety. That is, they privilege "the economy" (the agrarian revolutions, industrious revolutions, industrialism) or "the state" (governmentality, the ethnographic state, etc.) or "ideology" (the "Machiavellian moment," the crisis of liberalism) when explaining the broad direction of historical change. This sort of "rule of thumb" may work adequately for some national histories. But if these foundational approaches are applied to transnational history, one runs the risk of flattening out complexity, avoiding the unintended consequences of policies and actions, or ignoring convergences

and divergences which constitute the most fascinating features of historical change at world level.

I have tried to think of these issues in terms of different "drivers" of change (ideologies, economic change, the role of the state) at different periods and in different parts of the world. The interaction of these "drivers" produced "chaotic" changes (such as transnational revolutions) which cannot be traced back to any one of these "drivers" or domains alone.

But this was, again, more a historian's rule of thumb than a theory of change itself. Students pick up this sense of unease about change among their teachers and often ask the question "Why did that happen then?" It's particularly difficult for transnational historians to answer that one without simply drawing up lists. But it's a pretty important challenge.

AHR: These comments point to the high aspirations of transnational history, and certainly reveal a sophisticated awareness of what, both practically and theoretically, is at stake. Am I wrong in thinking that some of your comments, especially regarding pedagogy, political engagement, and an alertness to contemporary concerns, also reveal a certain frustration with, or an implicit critique of, certain recent trends in academia and among historians in particular—that is, a preoccupation with theory and a somewhat esoteric style of discourse? To be more specific: Does your own practice of transnational history imply a distancing from cultural studies or even subaltern studies?

Isabel Hofmeyr: I could not imagine transnational history without cultural studies. One key methodological challenge in any practice of transnational history is how one deals with circulation. How does one track the movement of objects, people, ideas, and texts using the sources at one's disposal? This is a difficult methodological conundrum in its own right, but more important still is the issue of what one deduces analytically from these modes of circulation and the fields of ideas that they bring into being across and between fixed political units.

Cultural studies has had a longstanding interest in popular media and its global distribution and circulation and has consequently grappled with what such circulation means for how publics come into being and how they think about themselves. Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* is perceptive on this point, as is Brian Larkin's work on Hindi cinema in northern Nigeria.

There is also a second reason for stressing circulation (and hence cultural studies) as a focus, which is that it allows one to sidestep what I see as a problem in some transnational studies, namely an over-reliance on a "grand narrative" of domination and resistance. In such analyses, whether of imperialism in the past or the present, the story is one of the North dominating and the South resisting. Understandings of the North are detailed, differentiated, and complex. Those of the South are one-dimensional, with its actors being allotted one of two roles, namely that of victim or

that of heroic resistor. Dipesh Chakrabarty pointed to this problem of asymmetrical knowledge some time ago in *Provincializing Europe*. Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* provides an extensive critique of the romance of domination and resistance. A transnational historical practice centered around circulation potentially offers a route for making visible a wider range of political possibilities.

A quick footnote to the previous discussion on the difficulties of making transnational history a sustainable academic enterprise in terms of courses, jobs, etc.: Another precondition for sustainability would be genuinely transnational gatherings of academics. We've just run a colloquium in Johannesburg called "South Africa/India: Re-imagining the Disciplines" that brought together scholars from the two countries. The event nearly didn't happen because of the byzantine procedures for securing South African visas in India. Making transnational history sustainable also has to take account of such factors.

Wendy Kozol: I similarly can't imagine transnational history outside of a framework that includes the theoretical insights and methodological practices of cultural studies. One of the problems stemming from a binary model of domination and resistance is the ways in which this has been mapped onto concepts of globalization and transnationalism.

Too often, globalization has been conceptualized as the powerful and oppressive processes of advanced capitalism, and transnationalism as the processes by which marginalized groups sustain cultures of resistance in response to the pressures of globalization. This binary model appeared in studies of globalization in the 1990s that attempted to distinguish between local and global cultures. Recent moves in transnational studies have challenged such limiting frameworks, often drawing on cultural studies perspectives that insist that material conditions and ideological frameworks cannot be disentangled and studied separately. I would argue that the most effective transnational historical studies are those that examine how cultural practices and ideologies shape, constrain, or enable the economic, social, and political conditions in which people and goods circulate within local, regional, and global locales. Transnational feminist scholars like Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan have been at the forefront of such critical reassessments, exploring how gender shapes social experiences in ways that don't simplistically chart conditions of power and inequality. Research on diasporic communities, for instance, cannot address immigrant experiences outside of discursive analyses of the complex ideological constructions of citizenship, domesticity, sexuality, or ethnicity. How gender and sexuality, for instance, sustain or challenge ethnic identities is always both material and ideological in a complex dialogue with local communities, the nation-state, and other economic, political, and social processes.

Chris Bayly: I agree that the idea of circulation as it has been developed in the cultural studies literature provides a way of doing transnational history without becoming trapped again in the binaries of domination and resistance or the history of

the nation. In particular, it helps break down the metropole-colony binary, or at the very least, to make it much more complex.

For instance, nineteenth-century Malay sultanates looked to the Ottoman Empire for legitimacy and to the Arab world for literature and culture, something that does not come out very clearly from the "colonial Malaya" literature, which mainly deals with the British "impact." As is well known, for colonized populations and even the remaining independent non-European peoples, Japan became a cultural point of reference and an icon of modernity during the same period, and especially after 1905.

There are some problems with some of the cultural studies approaches, however, which need to be guarded against. One is that they sometimes seem to end up by reifying "culture" or "cultures" in such a way as to make them seem authentic and real as against the inauthenticity of Western rationalism, modernized elites, and so on. There is a related danger of positing culture as an entity prior to economy in some way: this simply reverses the old catchphrase of Marxist materialism. Economy transforms culture as much as vice versa. At conferences I have attended, global and transnational historians have also continued to grapple with the problem of modeling the element of power into the concept of circulation. One should certainly qualify the grand narratives of domination and resistance, but even in the world of literature, for instance, there were powers and victims, dominances and exclusions, as Pascale Casanova points out in *The World Republic of Letters*. Finally, some interpretations of the concept of culture seem to occlude the realm of reasoned debate and argument in the emerging international public sphere created by associations, the press, and book publishing. This was of vital importance in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We badly need a fuller transnational history of ideas, one that deals with the lived experience of those ideas and also transcends the elite-subaltern divide.

Matthew Connelly: It would be difficult indeed to exclude "cultural studies"—scare quotes and all—from any field of history, especially one concerned with how nations came about, and how they continue to shape our perceptions of what is normal or different in world politics. For all the contributions of subaltern studies and cultural anthropology, it is still too easy to slip back into the habit of imagining global forces as transcending nations, and not creating them (along with many other things). Yet, by and large, it would seem that binaries are on the run. Does anyone disagree with the idea that the material and the ideological are always in dialogue, or that the processes entailed are "complex"? Too many people working in cultural studies promise merely to "complicate" our understanding of their subjects. And they persist in describing such work as "theoretical," as if theories were meant to render complexity less rather than more explicable.

This is not a problem specific to transnational history, as Isabel points out. It's just that the added challenge of working across conventional categories will make it all the more tempting to be satisfied with exploring representation and identity, rather than actually explaining why some are rich and others poor, and why we have war or peace. It is not that no one will pursue such questions, but rather that we will lose

opportunities to grapple with them together. That requires choosing sources and methods appropriate to the problem at hand, rather than prior commitments to "theory."

Consider the field of global history, which is just coming into its own—with its own journals and graduate programs. Most practitioners are concerned with what is often termed "political economy"—shorthand among subaltern scholars for the many things they tend to neglect, like demography, modes of production, technological adaptation, trade, and institutional change. When doing empirical work across broad stretches of space and time, it is easier to study things that can be counted and compared—such as life expectancy, or agricultural output. So, for instance, we have histories of world population, with fascinating and important debates about the relative importance of nutrition, public health, and so on. But we know much less about how, for instance, people first conceived of "world population" as something that could be measured and perhaps even controlled (a rather important idea in transnational history, considering how it helped people imagine themselves as part of a global community, if only to divide it up in new ways).

Cultural studies, on the other hand, has produced some fascinating work on how censuses and statistics figure in different kinds of political projects—particularly with the history of the census in India under the Raj. Bernard Cohn and Nick Dirks, among others, have shown how it represented Indian societies in various ways that reflected British notions of racial difference, and that had pernicious effects on caste politics for decades thereafter. And yet virtually no one has studied in any depth how independent India—working with and through transnational networks of population experts and activists—proceeded to implement staggeringly ambitious and coercive population control programs. I can't help but wonder whether the reason is that it requires slogging through archives—not just those of India, but of many international and nongovernmental organizations. When I work in the archives of the World Bank or the World Health Organization or the Ford Foundation, I find myself virtually alone (and wondering whether all the professed interest in "political economy" in the cultural studies field is sincere). Transnational histories of ideas, whether about caste or class, race or reproduction, should show how their circulation actually shaped people's lives, and that includes policies and programs that had life-and-death consequences for millions.[1]

If the material and ideological are always in dialogue, then perhaps it's time that practitioners of cultural studies start reading more military, economic, and diplomatic history.

Sven Beckert: Yes, my own practice of transnational history certainly does imply a distancing from cultural history. I am even cautiously optimistic that questions of

[1] Connelly, "To Inherit the Earth: Imagining World Population, from the Yellow Peril to the Population Bomb," *Journal of Global History* 1, no. 3 (December 2006); Connelly, "Seeing beyond the State: The Population Control Movement and the Problem of Sovereignty," *Past & Present* 193 (December 2006); Connelly, "Population Control in India: Prologue to the Emergency Period," *Population and Development Review* 32, no. 4 (December 2006).

economic change, state formation, and political economy might again become more central to historical inquiries as part of an embrace of transnational history. We live in a world of rapid economic change, of enormous concentrations of economic power, sharp social inequalities, and drastic disparities in the distribution of political power—both between and within states.

"Globalization" and "empire" are the buzzwords that describe some of these developments. If we, as historians, want to remain relevant to public debate, we need to engage these issues. Yes, the popular media does matter, as Isabel suggests, but so does the flow of capital and the control of guns. We should certainly study culture and ideas, but we will never understand them properly without also studying such issues as investment patterns, elite networks, and institutions. I entirely agree with Matt on this point. Transnational history can be vibrant and relevant without embracing any of the more fashionable trends in cultural history; Kenneth Pomeranz's work is an important case in point.

That said, I also believe that transnational history is not bound to any particular methodological approach. Political history can be transnational, and so can cultural history, intellectual history, and business history, among others. It is one of the strengths of transnational history to embrace this methodological diversity. In that way it is no different from, say, local history. The particular approaches employed are probably best determined by the kinds of questions one would want to answer. Ideally, transnational history is a "way of seeing." Much of the writing of history has been limited by its explicit or implicit nationalist vision. Transnational history focuses on uncovering connections across particular political units. Seeing these connections should come just as easily to historians as seeing connections within more familiar frames.

Patricia Seed: When cultural studies first emerged about twenty years ago, it had an innovative agenda—cultural migrations did not always result from an elite/subaltern divide; rather, art, video, and other forms of cultural expression found alternative means of circulation, into unexpected domains via unconventional individuals and groups. While area specialists may continue to find particular connections of interest, none of the more recent findings challenge us to think any differently about transnational history than many of us were thinking two decades ago.

In Latin American research, subaltern studies emerged in the early 1990s as a literary movement that generated a significant body of research and intellectual excitement. Latin Americanists in the U.S. and to a lesser extent the U.K. have recently been drawn to subaltern topics such as peasants, native peoples, and the responses to, and consequences of, political repression and torture. Hence, taking Ranajit Guha's approach—an innovative combination of Gramsci's political thinking with poststructuralist critiques—seemed a potentially beneficial comparative exercise to an already subaltern-oriented intellectual community. We experienced an extraordinary fifteen-year fluorescence in literary criticism, which has already witnessed subaltern studies' most innovative uses and now is taking off in different directions.

By the start of the twenty-first century, therefore, the intellectual leadership and innovation proffered by cultural and subaltern studies has largely dissipated. Instead we have been overtaken by a technological juggernaut—the cyber infrastructure which now occupies a parallel space alongside more traditional forms of communication and transportation, and which is already altering the discipline's transnational scope. This juggernaut has already altered the communicative space of our own discipline. Like other academics, we increasingly transact the mundane forms of interaction with our students and colleagues electronically. Beyond such humdrum uses, these byways have also altered the ways in which we teach, communicate with our colleagues, and disseminate our research results across national boundaries. Many historical books have already appeared electronically; others are being scanned by ultra-efficient bots. All of these changes have altered historians' transnational disciplinary networks.

Beyond our own colleagues and students, cyber communication is also changing the way historians deliver their ideas to a larger public, allowing them to find broader transnational audiences through the Internet. In the future, nontraditional media such as the Internet, cell phones, and video games may also change the way in which we communicate historical knowledge to a broader audience.

Electronic transmission has also already begun to alter the way historians relate their text to images. Half a millennium ago, another substantial shift took place when illuminated manuscripts gave way to the black-and-white world of woodcuts, engraving, and print. Now, as through the magic of RGB and BinHex numbers we are moving back into color and easily reproducible images, historians are beginning to rethink this fundamental alignment.

In addition to disseminating information and revising the relation of text to image, this cyber network creates social and intellectual groups among people separated by long distances and multiple time zones. These networks have already realigned some interdisciplinary work, as artists and performance studies now regularly engage with engineers and computer scientists. Will such networks have a similar impact on history? Will history's interdisciplinary relationships change—will literary and historical scholars perhaps increasingly cooperate transnationally on a single project? Peter Bol, Ge Jianxiong, Zhou Wenye, and Man Zhimin already collaborate on a major transnational geographic history of China's administrative units, urban areas, and rivers (the China Historical GIS project, www.fas.harvard.edu/~chgis). Finally, will cyber networks alter the familiar paradigm of a lone historian trudging through the archives into a collaborative (more transnational?) model of research in the future?

AHR: As discussed so far, transnational history certainly seems very broad, even all-encompassing, both in the subjects it takes on and in the methods it employs. But one thing it seems deliberately to avoid is falling into "grand narratives," as several of you have pointed out. These narratives are often configured around binary oppositions—North-South, elite-subaltern, dominance-resistance—the rejection of which also seems part and parcel of the approach outlined here. But what about the

question of development, broadly considered? How does a transnational approach differ from other approaches—from modernization theory, Marxism, dependency theory, socio-historical treatments of state-making, and the like—which implicitly or explicitly contain assumptions about the dynamic and direction of development over time? Would it be desirable if a transnational approach yielded another narrative about the nature of development? To be more specific, does this approach have something to tell us about the question of "modernity"?

Chris Bayly: I agree that the stark binaries of the "grand narratives" mentioned have to be avoided. But it would be difficult to write anything other than a rather disconnected history of fragments without taking them at least as starting points for debate and analysis. After all, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were indeed the period when an industrialized "North" greatly enhanced its wealth and human capacity in relation to a de-industrialized or agrarian "South." That was also the period when a particular sharply defined bloc of national states or colonial provinces was superimposed on earlier multiethnic empires and old patrias. The issue is how to show that this was a discontinuous, multilateral process, which even at the height of Western colonialism involved many interacting agents, including colonized peoples. The new states and provinces were often very weak, not just on their margins, but in their very centers. The "off-laying" of economic, military, and political functions by hard-pressed metropolitan powers meant that even at the depths of their relative poverty, assailed by famine and lacking the protection of their own national economies, colonized peoples could begin to build "capacity," in Amartya Sen's sense, either in conjunction with or often by resisting European or North American power. The problem with the modernization theorists of the 1960s and 1970s, as with more recent historians of the "rise of the West," is not that they misidentified the process, but that they reified it overmuch, that they identified only one model of "modernization" and failed to note this building of capacity away from the Western core. The roots of contemporary China's hectic industrialization or India's knowledge economy lay in the period when the West seemed most triumphant.

Isabel Hofmeyr: Transnational histories have certainly complicated understandings of modernity by radically extending our sense of the range of people and the array of sites involved. This scholarship has complicated ideas of time and space and makes the linear chronologies of developmentalist/modernization paradigms look somewhat restrictive.

In this regard, one aspect of transnational history that is worth highlighting is its postsecular orientation. If the nation is no longer the only or automatic referent, then one of its supposed constituents, namely its secularity, disappears as a boundary. This brings a whole new range of otherworldly or "postworldly" sites into the equation, like "heaven," the ancestral world, and so on.

These are, or at least should be, important analytical sites in transnational history. In popular versions of African Christianity, "heaven" or the ancestral world is constantly aligned with the modern through ideas of circulation. Texts, for example,

circulate between heaven and earth: texts appear to believers in dreams; believers travel to heaven in visions and are taught to read or are given documents which then materialize on earth; hymns appear on heavenly blackboards; and so on. Other examples from elsewhere in the world would include cases like Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons, and the divinely revealed golden plates. Through the idea and trope of circulation, "transworldly" spaces are brought into the ambit of modernity and its meanings are commensurately extended.

Matthew Connelly: I think we are all skeptical of grand narratives, because none has ever provided a satisfactory way to understand the history of the world, and some have actually served to justify oppression. But while they have done harm, and continue to confuse, where would we be without them? Ideas of modernization, development, and now globalization have provoked historians to provide better ways to explain how we got where we are today: a world in which people continue to struggle over the meaning of modernity, development can take many different directions, and the institution of state sovereignty is both more contested and more assertive.

The irony, of course, is that we depend on the older narratives, at least as something to argue with, without always providing much of an alternative (except more "complexity"). People are yearning for grand narratives that can better explain our times, but in the U.S. anyway, they have not been waiting for historians to give it to them. Instead, they read (or at least talk about) Samuel Huntington, Tom Friedman, and Jared Diamond. Popular history tends to be national history, but it need not be. If transnational is a way of seeing, it can certainly give us new ways to see popular subjects like military and political history, ways that will challenge readers and not just pander to them.

It is early days yet, and when grad students ask "What is transnational history"—or international or global history—I still tell them that it is they who will provide the answer, if they care to, through their own contributions. But I think that a certain narrative is emerging that can describe how the world has been coming together but also coming apart. It provides a new chronology less centered on Europe and how European peoples experienced change. Picking up where Chris Bayly left off, the last decades of the nineteenth century are rendered as much more than a time of great power rivalry, but a period of unprecedented movements in capital, goods, people, and ideas. The two world wars do not just bring dynastic and ideological change for a few nation-states, but usher in a crisis of the colonial world—a Third World War—in part because Europeans are given a taste of imperial violence and racism. Of course, Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans are the main authors of this history, changing ideas about state sovereignty and development by appropriating them for their own projects. The changing terms of exchange help to make world politics more pluralistic again, not just with new states, but international and nongovernmental organizations, including corporations, communications networks, terrorist cells, and crime syndicates.

The world is both coming together and coming apart because processes of integration lead to new kinds of fragmentation. Thus, when the nation-state is the universal norm, and border crossing becomes standardized and even ritualized, certain kinds of interchange become easier, while others become impossible. Cheaper, more rapid communications and travel can help create new, transnational communities but also undermine national solidarity. Asserting global norms, whether for gender equality, biodiversity, or protection of minorities, strengthens solidarity across borders but can also give rise to new borders within societies—sometimes quite literally.[2]

A transnational narrative cannot be organized around one center, or give all agency to one set of protagonists, which makes it inherently more challenging. But the narrative technique is all the more essential for people who want to make sense of this world, since writing a narrative forces us to explain change and identify who is driving it. Of all scholars, those of us who are working to illuminate connections across the world and trace them back through time should be the last to give up on the idea that humanity has a common history. If there is such a thing as transnational history which shapes the lives of people who might otherwise seem to live on different planets, should we not aspire to help them understand how they are all part of the same story?

Patricia Seed: Modernization, dependency theory, and Marxism all represent variations on development theory—how to understand which factors promote just and equitable economic growth, particularly in underdeveloped countries. However, these nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories enthroned the state as the central engine or mediator of economic growth. Transnational history has shifted that emphasis in several different ways. In the first instance, transnational history has multiplied the foci of research from the state alone to a variety of independent transnational economic actors—individuals, communities, migrants, or organizations that may have played independent roles in the economic growth of a city, state, or region. Transnational history has introduced a second shift in understanding economic changes. The dynamic and direction of development no longer focuses upon the already defined social and political formations. In addition to increasing the number of external transnational actors, this approach also multiplies the nature of the internal groups tied to transnational formations. Beneficiaries or losers from these transnational economic ties could be a district of a city or a particular clan instead of an existing social or political formation. In turn, these beneficiaries may have relationships to other different internal groups, again also outside existing political and social structures. In short, the landscape of internal and external economic actors has multiplied under the aegis of transnational history.

Finally, although influenced by cultural studies, the transnational historical approach differs from it. Where cultural studies seeks to find interconnectedness, transnational history examines the process by looking at not just which groups become connected, but also how they become excluded from transnational exchanges.

[2] Adam McKeown, *Asian Migration and the Invention of Border Control, 1834–1929* (New York, 2007).

Wendy Kozol: As several people have observed, transnational historical approaches produce narratives that provoke reconsideration of major conceptual categories such as development and modernity. Isabel, for instance, notes that transnational approaches challenge conventional assumptions about the relationship between secularism and modernity. Moving beyond an understanding of modernity as a Western process of progress and enlightenment, transnational narratives reveal modernity to be a multifaceted process whereby political, economic, and cultural exchanges occur in varied and often unpredictable ways. For instance, human rights advocacy in the twentieth and twenty-first century, many argue, has been closely identified with Western liberal concepts of individual rights since they were first articulated in the 1948 UN Declaration on Human Rights. Yet non-Western human rights activists have contested that framing, especially Eurocentric claims of universality, even as they recognize historical traditions of social, political, cultural, economic, and civil rights as granted by national and international laws. The danger of assuming that concepts like rights and justice emerged only from a Western tradition of Enlightenment, as Uma Narayan argues, is that such claims presume that no other culture has a history of rights upon which to condemn violence and oppression. Thus, a transnational historical perspective can account for how non-Western human rights activists appropriate and reconfigure international claims of rights and justice while also mobilizing discourses from other cultural and political traditions. In thinking through how transnational narratives can pose new ways of understanding modernity, I am reminded of Lila Abu-Lughod's comment about Western feminists' relationships with non-Western women: "we may want justice for women, but can we accept that there might be different ideas about justice and that different women might want or choose different futures from what we envision as best? We must consider that they might be called to personhood, so to speak, in a different language."[3]

Transnational analyses of the history of modernity allow us to engage with different languages of justice and rights that are themselves differentially tied to social structures of power within local, regional, and global contexts.

Sven Beckert: Again, to amplify my previous comment, I perceive transnational history largely as a "way of seeing," open to various methodological preferences, and to many different questions. It takes at its starting point the interconnectedness of human history as a whole, and while it acknowledges the extraordinary importance of states, empires, and the like, it pays attention to networks, processes, beliefs, and institutions that transcend these politically defined spaces. What precisely this transnational history will eventually look like is far from certain; it is being written as we speak. But it is already providing fresh insights into old and tired issues. Just think of the exciting work being done by Marcel van der Linden in Amsterdam on labor, or Patrick O'Brien in London on global inequality.

[3] Lila Abu-Lughod, " Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 787–788.

As you observed, transnational history is not about the creation of a new master narrative, and most practitioners would reject teleological accounts of historical change. Still, it engages existing master narratives, and has even suggested a new one, namely a story centered on the history of globalization. And, indeed, when we look at it from a very long perspective, let us say the past five hundred years, we can clearly identify a process in which humanity became more interconnected—economically, socially, politically, and culturally. This greater interconnectedness is one of the core changes that took place during these centuries, and transnational history has begun to build a narrative that focuses on this process. However, as we know, globalization was far from a uni-lineal development; moments of rapid globalization were at times followed by moments of de-globalization. Moreover, while globalization explains a lot about the world, it does not provide a full account of global social change. To me (but not necessarily to transnational history as such), capitalism and state formation remain the two master processes of the modern era. Yet neither the one nor the other can be explained without focusing on transnational and global connections.

Transnational history needs to engage existing large-scale accounts of social change, not least because all of the grand narratives mentioned in your question are in some ways transnational in orientation. Dependency theory is at its core about the relations of various parts of the world to one another; the global spread of capitalist social relations is important to Marxism; modernization theory postulates the possibility of the global spread of modernity, partly as a result of the interaction of various states with one another; and state-making à la Charles Tilly is all about transnational processes, namely the competition of various states with one another. We could do worse than engage these (competing) accounts of the emergence of the modern world. Transnational history does not differ a priori from any of these approaches—it engages them, it agrees and disagrees with their plots, but it fills a fundamentally different analytical space.

Insofar as transnational history engages one of the greatest questions in world history, namely why during the past two hundred years a small number of countries gained the capacity to produce, trade, and consume so much more than the rest of the world and accumulated unprecedented and unequaled state capacity and power, its answers will emphasize a particular set of factors. Historians thinking in terms of transnational history would most likely emphasize the importance of global links. Many of the transnational histories that we have indeed highlight the transnational origins of global economic and political inequality. Modernity, to them, is not just about one part of the world, or about one part of the world serving as an example to the rest, but fundamentally about the changing relations between various parts of the world. The shifting shape of the global is central to modernity itself—and that shift can only be explained by reference to actors in many different regions of the world. Modernity rests just as much on African slaves, Indian peasants, Chinese traders, and Arab mathematicians as on Lancashire mill workers, Scottish philosophers, German chemists, and American political theorists.

AHR: Clearly there is a lot to discuss concerning the definitions and implications of transnational history, but I would like to conclude on a more practical note. What do you see as the directions that research should take as guided by a transnational perspective? What subjects and topics, for example, might you encourage graduate students and other younger scholars to pursue? And what, as a sort of coda, would you say to established historians who might feel threatened by a transnational approach?

Chris Bayly: I feel that studies of diasporas (which would include movements of laborers, soldiers, intellectuals, technicians, etc.) are still a very worthwhile way of approaching transnational history, provided these studies grapple closely with the reception and domestication of such people and modes of life in the "host" society. The transnational history of ideas is also a particularly fruitful area for early modern and modern history. We need to get away from the assumption that ideas were simply disseminated from the West to the East and the South in the modern period. Instead, we need to see how liberalism, Marxism, and other systems of ideas were transformed and often deepened or generalized in extra-European and extra-American settings. This, rather than a search for the "authentic" indigenous culture, is a productive way of "provincializing Europe."

Matthew Connelly: One of the key problems of contemporary history is to understand how world politics is becoming more pluralistic without becoming more democratic. If transnational phenomena are transforming an international system premised on the principle of state sovereignty, then we might begin to discern what sort of system could take its place. This approach would help us to identify both the underlying causes of conflict as well as the norms, institutions, and practices that may yet bring more stability, if not justice.

But we can scarcely begin to sketch the outlines of the new, transnational system until we have a history of some of the most important ideas and institutions that animate world politics. This inquiry is well under way with some quintessentially global ideas—human rights, racism and anti-racism, "pan" movements, feminism, pacifism, environmentalism, etc. But if one compares it to the richness of the literature on nationalism, it's apparent that we still have a long way to go.

As a political historian, I'm even more struck by how spotty and underdeveloped is the history of international and transnational institutions. Students inclined to follow the well-trod path to College Park or Kew might reconsider the assumption that state archives are always the best place to begin learning about the world (or at least to seek a less familiar perspective by going to another national archive, like in Algiers or New Delhi). We lack archive-based histories of United Nations agencies, for instance, and some of the most important private foundations. The works we do have reflect idiosyncratic factors. For instance, the Rockefeller Foundation generously funds travel grants to use its archives, so there is a vast literature on Rockefeller (most of it highly critical). But the Ford Foundation archives, a short train ride away,

are ignored. Similarly, we have investigations of multinational corporations' involvement in the Holocaust, or the overthrow of Arbenz in Guatemala. But only economics departments seem interested in how they organize production and consumption worldwide. The transnational work of volunteer organizations and churches gets more attention. Yet all of the monographs on all of the foregoing subjects put together would scarcely compare to the ink spilled on the American Civil War.

There are many subjects—including the Civil War—that yield fresh insights when viewed through a transnational lens. Others will not. No particular approach is inherently superior, and asserting otherwise leads to a defensive response that discourages just this kind of dialogue. If transnational history really is potentially transformative, it is all the more important that practitioners are *diplomatic* historians. Without patience, tact, and a generous spirit, we cannot negotiate the spaces between fields and forge connections between them.

Wendy Kozol: Another direction for transnational historical research to pursue is the continuities and changes in communications technologies. How significant is the Internet, for instance, in changes in local political structures or in the formation of social identities? Is this fundamentally different from the impact of earlier technologies? For instance, some scholars in queer and feminist studies have explored new forms of communication in relation to the emergence of transnational social movements. As Matt has suggested, we need more historical research on the ideas and institutions that animate transnational politics, such as human rights, anti-racism, and environmentalism. What role has technology played in the formation of local communities and subjectivities in these movements? How has an increased ease of communication changed interactions between local and transnational activists, especially within the framework of contemporary globalization? What continuities persist to trouble optimistic claims about technological innovation?

Regarding the second question, as this discussion shows, transnational perspectives do not so much supplant as work in dialogue with theoretical approaches like feminism or Marxism. Transnational perspectives utilize historical methods and methodologies that have proven effective in studies of local or national contexts within a framework that encourages new perspectives on major global events and processes like war, migration, or neocolonialism.

Isabel Hofmeyr: I agree with Matt and Wendy that a study of transnational history opens up a productive set of themes around the institutions and media via which ideas are propagated transnationally. Linked to this would be another new area, namely to understand how people allow themselves to be addressed as transnational subjects or how they come to imagine themselves in this way. There is nothing automatic or self-evident in this process. New genres and modes of address need to be formulated; new ways of reading and reception have to evolve. Transnationalism hence opens up the possibility of producing new histories of reading and writing.

One important sub-theme in this area would be that of translation understood not as an abstract process but as a set of material practices that require detailed investigation. The possibilities inherent in this area can be seen in Lydia Liu's *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making*, which examines the translation practices that characterized China's encounter with the British Empire.

Another way in which transnationalism can open up new vistas is by directing our attention to "in-between" areas. One good example here would be the Indian Ocean, increasingly emerging as a focus of scholarly attention largely because it can take us beyond the Cold War "area studies" map which carved the world up into regions of discrete study so that the study of Africa and the study of Asia usually proceed with little reference to each other.

With regard to the last part of the question, I would say that the world itself will give us the lead. Circumstances are changing so rapidly that at some point it will be difficult not to have a transnational dimension in one's teaching and research.

Sven Beckert: The possibilities are endless; this is such a fresh perspective that we cannot tell where it is going to take us in the next few years. In my field, nineteenth-century United States history, we still have a real dearth of studies that explore core themes in U.S. history from a transnational perspective. A lot more work remains to be done on the U.S. Civil War, for example, on various reform movements, on labor, on the history of racism, on Reconstruction, on urban planning, on the history of Native Americans, and so on. Much of U.S. immigration history, moreover, deserves a second look from a global perspective. I also see lots of possibilities in studying the nineteenth-century global economy: During these years we had a very real intensification of transnational connections, but ironically, much of the research on global economic history, especially on transatlantic links, has focused so far on the period before 1800. Work on institutions regulating the global economy would also be highly welcome. Perhaps the best guide to future research, however, is to look at what's in the works right now among graduate students. I know of dissertations being written as we speak on such subjects as the global standardization of time, on the institutionalization of international economic relations, on late-nineteenth-century feminist internationalism, and on the regulation of the movement of people around the Suez Canal in the late nineteenth century. These are all important works on transnational history. For those of us in the United States, we need to make sure that we equip our students to engage in such projects by providing them with the necessary training in the history of various regions and equipping them with the language skills they will need to master archives and libraries throughout the world.

Patricia Seed: Transnational history does not threaten the traditional local or regional study that historians have always undertaken—although it does offer opportunities to conceptualize new projects in different terms. Most importantly, transnational history challenges historians to situate their topic differently within a larger framework. For many years, the larger framework for any historical work could be

taken for granted. In other words, the local or regionally focused study could assume the structure of the larger world to which it belonged.

Usually that structure consisted of something we already understood—a state or commercial hub. Introducing the transnational dimension into the larger framework signifies that the larger framework needs to be examined and in some cases located rather than simply assumed to exist.

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